

Introduction

Week before last I was in Door County and took a hike in Peninsula State Park. Near Eagle Terrace there is a beautiful lookout called Eagle Panorama which affords a gorgeous vantage point from which you can look out over the peninsula and Green Bay and back over the town of Ephraim with its Eagle Harbor. Just beautiful! I have some really good pictures, but they do not tell the whole story. One of the main reasons I enjoy traveling is I like to sightsee. I like to see the sights. I enjoy seeing and experiencing in person what previously I have only seen in pictures. This morning we continue our study of Matthew and right now of the Sermon on the Mount. Specifically we are camping out on the Beatitudes. And as we come to Beatitude number 6, we are directed toward the sight of all sights. Jesus declares that certain ones will see God.

[Read Text and Pray]

This blessing statement by which Jesus introduced the Sermon on the Mount is not the first of the beatitudes in order, but it is the most foundational to the happiness and blessedness that he talks about here. Seeing God is both foundational and paramount to all other blessings.

Therefore, this is truly one of those passages that is deep and wide. Its depths are immeasurable and its breadth is impossible to encompass. This short little beatitude is among the greatest utterances of all the Bible. It may not come across with the same shock as the others, but it is profoundly weighty in what it says.

I. The Sight of All Sights

A. To see God is to see the incomparable, the Holy, the fountainhead from which all that is beautiful comes. His beauty is so intense that it surpasses normal human capacity. The thought that pervaded the mind of Jacob was that any sight of God would result in death. When Jacob was on his way back to the homeland after years of being away, he was left alone. God came to him in the form of a man and wrestled with him all night. The man

spoke to Jacob and said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and men and have prevailed." So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel which means "the face of God." His explanation was this: "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

Years later, after the journey of Israel and his sons into Egypt and their ensuing bondage there, God raised up Moses to lead them out of the house of slavery. After Moses led the people out, he was privileged by the Lord to ascend Mt Sinai to the presence of the Lord. He was privileged to commune with the Lord face to face in the tent of meeting. So glorious was the encounter that the face of Moses would glow.

Many years later God calls Isaiah to the office of prophet. He writes, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." As a result, he cried out over his sin saying, "woe is me . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Ezekiel saw a similar vision some years later. He describes in detail in Ezekiel 1 the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And he says that when he saw it he fell on his face.

Then in the NT book of Revelation, John describes the glorious appearance of Jesus to him. And he writes, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."

Such is the beauty and majesty and glory of the appearance of God. So beautiful, so majestic, so grand is his appearance that one's only appropriate response is to fall prostrate.

B. We also learn from Scripture that there are levels of seeing God. By this I am referring to levels of apprehending God. We can actually see things about God as we look at creation. We can grasp characteristics of his as we read his word and as others share with us their knowledge of him. But to experience him personally, is a deeper more profound experience altogether. This was the experience of Job. You know Job, the man who suffered so terribly and whose friends came to try to comfort him but

merely shared their mutual ignorant musings about who God is and how God operates. At last God came to Job and showed him himself, led him to consider his ways and works. After this encounter, Job says, (42:5) "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."

In another place Job makes this confident assertion: For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last time he will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold . . ." (Job 19:25-27a)

The psalmist urges, "Taste and SEE that the Lord, he is good."

And there is this promise in John's first epistle. In chapter 3, he writes: Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2-3)

C. But we cannot talk about seeing God without considering some texts which unequivocally declare that God cannot be seen. Take for example,

1 Timothy 1:17 – To the King of the Ages, immortal, INVISIBLE, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

The point is made that God by nature is invisible. He cannot be seen.

1 Timothy 6:15-16 – he . . . is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see."

John 1:18 – No one has ever seen God; the only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Corresponding to these verses Jesus told the woman at the well that God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

These sets of texts exhibit the profundity of seeing God. We must consider how these two groups of biblical texts work together. On the one hand we

are told of men who speak of the experience or the future certainty of seeing God. We have the promise of Jesus that the pure in heart will see God. But on the other we have statements that instruct that God is unseeable, that He is INVISIBLE. Clearly then there must be a distinction in the kind of seeing the Bible is talking about. In one sense God is unseeable, but there is a sense in which certain persons have and yet shall see God. They will behold him. They will marvel at him. And they do behold him, know him, taste him, experience him. And they shall see him even more clearly in the future.

D. John Piper has explained this seeming inconsistency with helpful clarity. He asserts that there are two different senses in which God's people can see God and two different senses in which they cannot see God.

First, the ways we cannot see God:

1. We can't see God with our physical eyes for the simple reason that he is a spirit, and he doesn't have a body. That is probably at least part of what Paul means when he says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

2. We can't see God even spiritually without our view being mediated. This is partly owing to our sinfulness and partly owing, perhaps, to our creaturely weakness. He is too great, too bright, too glorious, and we could not live if we saw him with unmediated directness. We must always have Christ our Mediator as a go-between. And I think that is what Jesus meant when he says in John 6:45–46, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me — not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father."

Now, when it says, "except he who is from God; he has seen the Father," he means, not with physical eyes. The Son of God didn't have physical eyes before the incarnation, and that is what he is contrasting our seeing with. Only the Son can see the Father with non-physical, unmediated, direct seeing. We cannot see God spiritually the way the Son of God in

unmediated directness can see him. So, those are the two ways we can't see God when we use the word "see" in different ways.

Here are the two ways we can see God:

1. We use the word "see" to mean that we finally understand and discern the beauty and glory of God after being blind to it. Like when we say: Oh, now I see. Our soul is tuned in to the glory so that the glory of God that shines through the gospel is seen as glorious, and we are no longer spiritually blind to it. That is the first way we see him.
2. And the second way is that, in the narrative of the Bible, we see the glory of God and finally we will see him face to face through Christ — by seeing Christ. So, John 1:14, 18 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." So, we see God by seeing Jesus. And 1 John 3:2, "We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

And I would add the instruction of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. He underscores that when people turn to Christ, they take a position of waiting and looking for him to come from heaven. And when the time of his appearing arrives, he will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. When he comes on that day, he will be marveled at among all who have believed. They will look and they will be utterly amazed at his beauty and his glory.

This is nothing less than the most beautiful, most glorious, most breathtaking sight ever to be beheld by any human or angelic eye. Nothing can compare. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul draws attention to this grand assurance saying, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." It is the glorious vision of himself in Jesus, who is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Nothing more beautiful or glorious. Nothing more satisfying. Nothing even comparable. Nothing more joy-inducing. And that is why Jesus says that

these are blessed. "Blessed are these who see God." Graced with divine favor. Over-flowing with joy. Happy. Blessed. Of all the blessings that are ours, this is the surpassing blessing . . . To see God!

But who will see God in this way?

II. The Character of Those Who See God

A. Blessed are THE PURE IN HEART, for they shall see God.

Among the things that disturbed Jesus while here on earth, it was the appearance of righteousness that was devoid of heart reality which he found particularly repugnant. Hypocrisy was and is especially aggravating to Christ. It was especially characteristic of the ones Jewish society deemed most righteous—the Pharisees. They and those they influenced sought to be right with God through keeping the law. And it was not only the law of Moses, but a legalistic system that added scores of laws established by rabbis through the years. Their focus had devolved to center purely on keeping traditions without attention to the heart.

For example, the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus basically rebuking him for not following the traditions of the elders. They asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." Jesus answered them, [and I paraphrase] "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded you to honor your father and mother, but you keep back help you could give to your parents by declaring your wealth as given to God according to the traditions. So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God."

Jesus declared, "You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said: This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Later Jesus indicted these hypocrites in this way: You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Listen. The heart is where it is at for God. When the Lord sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought

surely this is the Lord's anointed. He had that look. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart." Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Psalm 51:6 says that God "desire(s) truth in the inmost being." In Jeremiah 17:10, the Lord speaks, "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind."

Now, this does not mean that God does not look at the deeds we do. Certainly he does. But he does not JUST look on the outside. What is on the inside is what the Jews in general were overlooking and they thought themselves pure by virtue of the outside, but Jesus is teaching that those who have the privilege of seeing God are not just pure on the outside. They are pure as well on the inside. In fact, what is on the inside is what is fundamental to the person. What is on the inside, in our heart is from where what is on the outside springs.

B. And so there is a really glaring problem that confronts us all. None of us by nature has a pure heart. What comes naturally from every sinful heart are sinful attitudes and actions. Jesus instructs that it is not what is on the outside that makes a man unclean but what is on the inside. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These defile a person. And when God looks on the heart of men, what he sees is not purity. So how can a person have the blessed assurance that they will see God?

That is one of the questions the Bible was written to answer.

Ezekiel 36 spoke of the need for a heart transplant, that God must and would take his people from the nations and sprinkle them clean and give them a NEW HEART. He would cause His Spirit to dwell within them and to cause them to walk in obedience to him from the heart. Through Jeremiah the Lord says he would write the law of God on the hearts of his people. It is David in Psalm 51 who cries to the Lord to create in him a clean heart.

From the OT it is clear that a clean heart, a pure heart is something God would have to work in us to make us fit to see him. And the NT continues this theme. Hebrews 10:22 urges us to draw near to the Lord with a true

heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean. Titus 3:5 says that he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches that "If any person is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away behold new things have come."

The Bible is clear. Those who will have the great pleasure and delight to see God are those and only those who have a pure heart. And a pure heart is something we can have only through the mercy of God provided through Jesus Christ. Those who come to faith in Christ are those who are given the hope of beholding Christ when he appears. Sins forgiven. Hearts cleansed, our hope and joyful expectation is to see Him when he comes and to joyously marvel at him. Do you have this hope this morning? If not, there is good news! We preach Christ to you. He came and died as a sacrifice for sins so that our hearts may be sprinkled clean! You need to respond to Christ by believing in him, trusting in him, to be forgiven of your sin and sprinkled clean from the impurity of your sin. He will give you a clean heart. He will make you new. You can be assured you will see God!

Conclusion

But this message is not only an encouragement to the lost to come to Christ. It is also an encouragement to those walking with Christ that we seek holiness. That we be renewed in our pursuit of holiness.

1 John 3:2 is directed at Christ-followers. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The hope and the anticipation of beholding Christ in his purity holds before us the incentive to purify ourselves, to perfect holiness. So let me urge and encourage every Christ-follower in this place this morning to anticipate the glory, to look forward to the revealing of Christ, and in that anticipation to pursue holiness in the fear and joy of God.

Every trip you take you have to get ready. Decide where you are going. What sights are you going to see? Book your ticket or fuel the car. Plan

the route. Pack your things. Get ready. Any day now Jesus is coming to get his people to take us to heaven. We need to be ready. We are going to see God. You don't need to fuel the car or plan the route. You just need to make sure you are in Christ by faith. And then in anticipation of seeing Christ, purify yourself.